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Studies of self-esteem often fail to distinguish between success-based self-esteem and defensive, fantasy-based self-esteem. This study investigates the extent to which college students seeking vocational counseling over- or under-estimate their measured needs and interests in areas of high, intermediate, and low vocational identity, when measures of self-esteem and defensive self-esteem are and are not controlled. Some 41 male college students served as the sample. Findings indicate that college students seeking vocational counseling are generally quite accurate in estimating their measured needs and interests, although they tend to over-estimate in areas of high vocational identity. Self-esteem and defensive self-esteem, as measured here, showed little, if any, independence in their relationships with difference between estimated and measured needs and interests. Differences in over-estimation occurred between measuring instruments. Discussion of discrepancies may prove valuable in the counseling process. (BP)

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# Self-Esteem, Defense Positive and Perceptual Accuracy in Vocational Choice

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Recently, several studies have demonstrated that high and low self-esteem persons are apt to seek out academic or vocational situations which require roles and abilities congruent with their own self-percepts (Korman, 1966, 1967; Levanthal & Perloe, 1962; and Silverman, 1964). Coopersmith (1959, 1960) and Silber & Tippett (1965), however, point out that studies of self-esteem often neglect to distinguish between self-esteem which is based on feelings of self-satisfaction associated with one's experiential background and defensive self-esteem which attempts to ward off self-depreciating feelings by making unrealistically high self-appraisals based on success achieved through fantasy. To date, however, attempts to develop measures of self-esteem independent of defensive self-esteem have been largely unsuccessful.

The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Fitts, 1965), purports to measure both self-esteem and defense positive, but acknowledges the scales are overlapping. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the extent to which college student clients seeking vocational counseling tend to over estimate or under estimate their measured needs and interests in areas of high, intermediate, and low vocational identity when measures of self-esteem and defensive self-esteem are controlled and when they are not.

## Method

Forty-one male college students, all clients of the University of Cincinnati Counseling Service and engaged in vocational counseling, were administered a basic test battery which included the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (EPPS), Kuder Preference Record, Vocational Form C (Kuder-C), Strong Vocational Interest Blank (SVIB), Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSC), and a series of vocational self-assessment forms.

The P scale (self-esteem) and the DP scale (defense positive) of the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale constituted the independent variables. The vocational self-assessment forms consisted of 3 five interval scales on which subjects estimated their measured needs and interests on the EPPS, Kuder-C, and SVIB. In addition, S's were asked to indicate the occupation they expected to enter, their level of committment to the occupation, and to specify 3 EPPS need scales, 2 Kuder-C interest areas, and 2 SVIB occupational families which were most and least important to development within their selected occupations. The magnitude and direction of differences between estimated and measured scores on the 3 instruments for the scales nominated as areas of high, intermediate, and low vocational identity constituted the dependent variables.

The accuracy of client self-percepts without regard to self-esteem or defense positive was assessed by placing each Ss' estimated and measured scores on nine 5 x 5 matrices, one matrix for each level of vocational identity for each of the three instruments. The matrices were analyzed following the information

theory approach as outlined by Attneave (1959).

## Results

Table 1 indicates that measured and estimated needs are not independent of each other. The S's in general were able to estimate their measured scores with moderate to high accuracy regardless of whether their needs and interests were of low, intermediate, or high vocational identity. The relationships between measured and estimated scores are particularly high for SVIB occupations of low and high vocational identity. When S's misperceived their needs and interests, they tended to over-estimate in areas of high vocational identity, particularly on the Kuder-C and the EPPS where the ratios of over estimations to under estimations were two to one or more.

The patterns of over and under estimations across instruments and levels of vocational identity were inspected independently by comparing the diagonals. The data indicated that degree of moderate to severe over estimation (2 cell difference or more) on all three tests is linearly related to level of vocational identity (Page's $L = 42$; $p < .01$). Linearity, however, did not exist between moderate to severe under estimation and level of vocational identity.

Table 2 indicates that when self-esteem and defense positive features of S's are considered, they tend to be associated with over estimation of interests on the Kuder-C in areas of high vocational identity. Further, defense positive is negatively

related to under estimations of high identity Kuder-C interests and positively associated with over estimations of intermediate vocational identity Kuder-C interests. Self-esteem is also related to over estimations of similarity to SVIB occupational families of high vocational identity. Self-esteem and defense positive were not systematically related to differences between perceived and estimated needs on the EPPS, or generally related to differences in areas of low or intermediate vocational identity.

## Discussion

These findings indicate that college student clients seeking assistance in making career choices are generally quite accurate in estimating their measured needs and interests on the Kuder-C, EPPS, and SVIB. However, they tend to over estimate their measured needs and interests in areas of high vocational identity much more than is true in areas of low or intermediate vocational identity. Misperceptions also occur with greater frequency on the EPPS and Kuder-C than on the SVIB.

High self-esteem and defense positive clients tended to distort self-percepts by over estimating their interests of high vocational identity, but did not systematically distort estimates of personal needs on the EPPS. Further, self-esteem and defense positive were not generally associated with distortion of measured needs and interests in areas of low or intermediate vocational identity. In fact, self-esteem and defense positive as measured by the Tennessee Self Concept Scale show little, if any, independence in their relationships with differences between perceived

and measured needs and interests at all levels of vocational identity. The TSC, then, has not resolved the traditional problem of isolating self-esteem from defensive self-esteem.

The results do indicate, however, that given the general tendency for clients to over-estimate their interests of high vocational identity on the Kuder-C, high self-esteem or defense positive clients may be seriously distorting their perceptions on this instrument. Self-esteem and defensive self-esteem do appear to affect significant vocational self-percepts and should be taken into account during vocational counseling.

Finally, the use of client self-estimations provides a positive function in the counseling relationship. The client's estimates may be analyzed both to determine whether patterns of over or under estimations exist, or if serious misperceptions are occurring in specific need or interest areas. Discussions of such discrepancies may serve as a vehicle to explore the client's feelings of adequacy, or help to clarify erroneous information or stereotypes as he considers various vocational alternatives.

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Table 1

Information Values, Chi-Squares, and Contingency Coefficients of Measured and Estimated Needs and Interests, and Ratios of Under Estimations to Over Estimations

| Tests | Vocational Identity Levels | $\hat{H}_{(m)}$ | $\hat{H}_{(e)}$ | $\hat{T}_{(m,e)}$ | $X^2$ | C | Ratios of Estimation O/U |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| EPPS | | | | | | | |
| | High | 2.150 | 2.148 | .419 | 69.651** | .606 | 2.000 |
| | Intermediate | 1.972 | 1.950 | .057 | 28.651* | .271 | 1.804 |
| | Low | 2.166 | 2.228 | .407 | 67.757** | .601 | 1.105 |
| KUDER-C | | | | | | | |
| | High | 2.059 | 1.781 | .339 | 38.509** | .565 | 2.400 |
| | Intermediate | 2.058 | 2.188 | .347 | 118.433** | .570 | .796 |
| | Low | 1.954 | 2.163 | .383 | 43.573** | .589 | .821 |
| SVIB | | | | | | | |
| | High | 2.616 | 2.738 | .770 | 489.902** | .718 | 1.065 |
| | Intermediate | 2.261 | 2.349 | .362 | 486.001** | .578 | .760 |
| | Low | 3.128 | 3.203 | 1.628 | 925.191** | .832 | .856 |

* $p \leq .05$
** $p \leq .01$

Maximum C for 5 x 5 matrix = .894

Table 2

Correlations of Differences between Self-Perceived and Measured Needs and Interests and Self-Esteem, and Defense Positive

| Tests | Identity Levels | S-E | DP |
|---|---|---|---|
| EPPS | | | |
| | High Vocational Identity | | |
| | Over-Estimation | .005 | .005 |
| | Under-Estimation | .194 | .160 |
| | Intermediate Vocational Identity | | |
| | Over-Estimation | - .059 | - .030 |
| | Under-Estimation | .231 | .078 |
| | Low Vocational Identity | | |
| | Over-Estimation | .035 | .010 |
| | Under-Estimation | .119 | .278 |
| Kuder-C | | | |
| | High Vocational Identity | | |
| | Over-Estimation | .306* | .368* |
| | Under-Estimation | - .236 | - .333* |
| | Intermediate Vocational Identity | | |
| | Over-Estimation | .260 | .314* |
| | Under-Estimation | - .205 | - .058 |
| | Low Vocational Identity | | |
| | Over-Estimation | .291 | .230 |
| | Under-Estimation | .163 | .224 |
| SVIB | | | |
| | High Vocational Identity | | |
| | Over-Estimation | .324* | .241 |
| | Under-Estimation | - .252 | - .130 |
| | Intermediate Vocational Identity | | |
| | Over Estimation | .266 | .233 |
| | Under-Estimation | .007 | - .129 |
| | Low Vocational Identity | | |
| | Over-Estimation | .117 | .026 |
| | Under-Estimation | - .083 | .017 |

* $p \leq .05$